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FM AMEMBASSY TALLINN
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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS TALLINN 000598

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EU](#) [EN](#)

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT OFFERS SUPPORT
FOR ESTONIA'S LANGUAGE REFORMS

¶1. (U) Summary: In August, President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Poettering visited Estonia to discuss the GOE's language and integration reform efforts for the Russian-speaking minority. Poettering met with representatives of Estonia's Russian-speaking community as well as President Ilves, Prime Minister Ansip and key Parliamentarians. Poettering publicly commended the GOE's integration efforts -- in particular its language reforms in Russian-speaking schools -- and mildly chastised Russia's refusal to acknowledge its history in regards to Soviet occupation of the Baltic States. End Summary.

Russian-Speaking Minority Integration

¶2. (U) According to Anneli Entson, Advisor to Speaker of the Estonian Parliament Ene Ergma, the principal purpose of Poettering's August 14-17 visit was to hear the views of representatives of Estonia's Russian-speaking minority on the European Union (EU) and life in Estonia. Poettering met with leaders from the "Russian Party", Russian-speaking members of the Center Party, business leaders, and different cultural associations in Narva. (Note: Narva is Estonia's third largest city. It is located on the border with Russia and its population is 98% Russian-speaking. End Note.) Poettering told the press that his meetings confirmed that Estonia's Russian speakers see their future in Estonia and the EU.

¶3. (U) While some Russian speakers complained to Pottering about the Estonian language test requirement for citizenship, Poettering commended the GOE's promotion of Estonian language in Russian-speaking high schools as an important tool for integrating the Russian-speaking minority. He encouraged Russian speakers to fully integrate themselves as Estonian and European citizens. Entson said that Poettering's support for Estonia's language reforms was extremely important in light of renewed accusations from Moscow on Estonian "mistreatment" of the Russian-speaking minority.

Europe's Relations With Russia

¶3. (U) In their meetings with Poettering, senior GOE and Parliament officials (e.g., President Ilves, Prime Minister Ansip, Speaker Ergma, and other officials) discussed the EU's relations with Russia. Parliamentary Speaker Ergma thanked Poettering for the European Parliament's support during the Bronze Soldier crisis in April. Ergma stressed the need for the EU to strengthen its common policies vis-a-vis

Russia, especially with regard to energy security. Ergma said the EU must take a stand on its democratic principles and not sacrifice them for economic/national self-interest. President Ilves told Poettering that it is crucial for Europe to speak with one voice and for EU member states to demonstrate more solidarity when dealing with Moscow. Poettering agreed that there is a lack of unity in the EU on Russia.

¶4. (U) In his comments to the press, Poettering chastised Moscow for its refusal to acknowledge the suffering of Estonia and the other Baltic States during the period of Soviet occupation. "Life under the communist dictatorship left a very strong mark on Estonians," Poettering told the Estonian press, "[and] that understanding, I think, is not very widespread in Russia." Poettering called on Russia to deal honestly with its history. Jaanus Rahumagi, MP and member of the parliamentary Estonia-U.S.A Group, hailed Poettering's visit as an example of the European Parliament's consistent support for Estonia. Poettering's positive assessment of Estonia's integration efforts and criticism of Russia's refusal to honestly deal with its history went over well with his GOE and parliamentary hosts. Our MFA interlocutors have told us that they hope this message from such a high-level EU official will counter some of Moscow's "anti-Estonian" press.

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